

“Tis the Season to be.... Sneezin’”

Live Healthy and Be Well!

--Stephen Jarrard, MD, FACS

This month's topic is brought to us by Spring. Seasonal allergies always hit us at this time of the year, some of us worse than others, as pollen fills the air and covers our cars. The medical term for this condition is *Allergic Rhinitis*, which is an inflammation of the nasal passages and upper airways. This condition occurs when a sensitized individual inhales pollen, dust or animal dander, and their immune system reacts by producing substances that result in the formation of *histamine*. Histamine then causes the typical reactions we see in individuals with “hay fever.” The usual symptoms are sneezing, nasal congestion, scratchy cough, itchy, watery eyes, and sometimes even itching of the skin or “hives.” Some people can have the symptoms to the point of not being able to work or go to school during the heavy pollen season. Also, some people who are affected may also experience these symptoms (usually to a milder degree) in the fall of the year, and this is usually due to the production of mold spores as leaves fall and begin to decay.

Seasonal allergies are a very common affliction. As with many such conditions, there is a genetic component, as well as an environmental component. So, it may run in families to some degree, and also depends on where you live, as well as how much pollen is produced that year. If there is a lot of rain in the spring, to keep the air clean, it may not affect you as badly as in other years with less rain. Or, you may be affected in a certain locale or place you live, and not so much or not at all if you move somewhere else. For instance, I was never bothered with this condition except for a four year period when I lived in the Hudson Valley of New York State. After moving from there to East Tennessee, and later to the great State of Georgia – I have never been bothered by it much again.

Allergic Rhinitis in and of itself is very annoying, but not especially dangerous from a health perspective. It can and does have some secondary effects, however, that we need to guard against. When you are producing extra mucus, you have a better chance of spreading germs to others. This is especially inconvenient if you are in a profession where you have to be around or in close contact with other people. The constant rubbing or blowing of your nose can leave it raw and sore, and the cough, sneezing, and postnasal drip can lead to sore throat and laryngitis. If you are affected by seasonal allergies, you have more of a chance of getting a sinus infection if the inflammation of the upper nasal passages should enter your sinuses. Also, people with frequent allergies have more of a chance of the allergic inflammation going into the airways of their lungs – a condition known as *bronchial asthma*.

The best form of treatment of seasonal allergies is to avoid the offending allergens, or at least try to limit your exposure as much as possible. However, since few of us can afford to stay in the house behind air filters or wear a gas mask all day and night, more of our treatment strategies

tend to involve the control of symptoms with medication until the main pollen season is over, then most people 's symptoms seem to resolve to a great degree. The use of inhaled nasal steroids (nasal spray) can help to reduce the inflammation, congestion, and slow down the mucus production if used on a regular basis during the season. Another approach is to control symptoms by limiting or eliminating the production of histamine, the so-called “anti-histamine” drugs. The original type of this medicine was Diphenhydramine (Benadryl), which works well but has to be used with caution during the day or at work as it tends to make you very sleepy. The newer “second generation” anti-histamines tend to block histamine without the sleepy side effects, and are more useful. These medicines no longer require a prescription, usually need to be taken only once a day, and can be attained over the counter at any drug store.

Some people who have more severe, chronic, or “perennial” allergies (more year round) may benefit from allergy testing. This testing will provide information about the specific things causing allergic reactions, and then a customized serum can be formulated to provide “allergy shots” usually taken once a week. Over time, these shots can help to de-sensitize a person to the things they are severely allergic, too. They are not always the answer, but sometimes can help. Please ask your provider for more information about this is you have these types of severe reactions.

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to [rabundocor@gmail.com](mailto:rabundocor@gmail.com), or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at [www.rabundocor.com](http://www.rabundocor.com) in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundocor. Until next month, live healthy and be well!